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Rescued Children

*by Rabbi Oscar Werner
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The story of my life is certainly not unique. However, it is full of events that have changed the direction of my life and have caused me to acquire certain basic and essential values. I was affected by the turmoil created by Hitler prior to and during World War II. Many Polish Jews emigrated after World War I on account of the hopeless economic position prevailing then in the country. My parents chose Germany, which then still seemed a desirable option. I was born in the city of Hannover and was brought up by my parents as a "good Yiddish boy". There was religious freedom then and I was in high school when the Nazis really cracked down . I was thrown out of school for having committed the crime of being born a Jew.

Although I must have been pampered and spoiled as an only child, my parents had to make a difficult decision. They sent me far away from home to give me a good education. I attended the Yeshiva High School in Frankfurt-on-Main in southern Germany, one of the few places where such institutions existed.

I studied there for 2-1/2 years. I would come home twice a year, during vacation time on Passover and on Rosh Hashanna. Then, in October 1938, after Yom Tov, Hitler decided to expel all foreign Jews from Germany and to send them back to their birthplace. My parents were sent to the border and for a period of time were housed in a dreadful camp in Zbanzyn. I, too, had a Polish passport and was sent out of Frankfurt. However, the Polish authorities would not allow me into the country since my passport had been sent to the consulate in Hamburg for renewal. I was shattered that I could not join my parents. I felt I would do anything to get out of cursed Germany.

I was imprisoned over a weekend after I was caught in an attempted crossing of the border. Then I was sent back to

Hannover, all alone and feeling miserable. It became my task then, as a teenager, to make major decisions in my life. I packed many of our belongings and shipped them off to Poland. I was not aware of the plight and miserable existence of my parents in the camp Zbanzyn. But a school pal, Hershel Grunspan, who then lived in Paris, knew the situation his parents were in. His assassination of a German official at the embassy sparked off the "Kristallnacht", the night of broken glass, which is now history. I heard the explosion of our beautiful main Shul during the night of November 9-10. I went the next day to snatch a sacred broken stone from the Shul which remained with me for a long time and I believe helped me to safety. Some of my family in Palestine tried to get me out of Germany, but a chance to get to England came first. Britain took 10,000 young Polish Jews in the "Kinder Transport". In January, 1939, I left by boat via Holland. The joy was so great as we started to taste freedom. It was like the Exodus from Egypt, and new vistas opened in my life. My grandchildren have often asked me to tell them this story.

After the war I went to Tarnow, Poland and found out about the murder of my parents. The Nazis had executed 25,000 Jews on June 14, 1942.

